

MINUTES

Mansfield Advisory Committee on the Needs of Persons with Disabilities

Regular Meeting - Tuesday October 26, 2010

2:30 PM - Conference Room B - Audrey P. Beck Building

I. Recording Attendance:

Present: W. Gibbs (Chair), J. Tanner, C. Colon-Semenza, Rachel Leclerc (staff/guest), KA Easley (staff), K. Grunwald (staff)

Regrets: J. Blanshard, J. Sidney

II. Approval of Minutes: The minutes for September 28, 2010 were accepted, with the correction of J. Tanner expressing regrets.

III. New Business

- a. Children with Disabilities: Rachel Leclerc, Director of Special Education and Student Support Services for the Mansfield Public Schools attended the meeting as a guest. Members explained that we are attempting to expand the role of the committee to look at the needs of children with disabilities. Rachel reports that her department provides services to children

from age 3 to 8th grade. She supervises all personnel who provide services to children with special needs. Children are often referred as early as age 2, which may be the first time that parents are connected to services. Not all parents are aware of birth-3 services. The school system holds a screening for 3 and 4 year old children in May for pre-school services. This is advertised as a pre-school screening to determine eligibility. This is also an opportunity to identify children with special needs. Results of the screening are shared with parents. Some children are admitted as “models students” into the pre-school program. Two years ago they changed the focus from special education to a general pre-school program. In kindergarten some children with special needs are identified who have not had a preschool experience. Staff can serve as consultants to the classroom teacher rather than providing direct services. The goal is inclusion for all children when appropriate. No child is turned away, and children that they serve run the gamut of abilities and disabilities. By law, testing must be done for children who are identified as possibly having disabilities. State law requires classroom intervention prior to testing for children with learning disabilities. There are 2 special ed. teachers at each elementary school, along with a full-time school psychologist. Their main focus is working with teachers in classrooms. Each school also has a full-time speech clinician. Trends: large onset of young children identified on the autism spectrum. There is a group of staff

trained to identify children on the educational spectrum (Autism Diagnosis Observational System) to determine their needs; not a medical diagnosis. The school system is also focused on the use of assistive technology, and contract with EASTCONN to evaluate children's needs. C. Colon-Semenza asked about how this committee can step in beyond children's educational needs? One of the issues does have to do with accessibility issues at the schools. Rachel reports that there are no core groups of children with specific disabilities/of a certain age that could be grouped together. C. Colon-Semenza raised the question about a support group for parents and families or maybe a recreational group for children. Rachel refers to the Parks & Rec. Department for inclusive programs. In the past there has been a support group for parents at the Middle School in one specific classroom. The school system has been in touch with the Special Ed. PTA (SEPTA), which is currently very active in Willington. This may be a venue for parents in Mansfield, Ashford and Willington. Rachel feels that the biggest need for parents is respite care and support. She also sees that transportation is an issue. K. Easley asked if there are any staff or parents who would be interested in joining this committee? Rachel will put that question out.

b. "Other": none.

IV. Old Business

- a. Goals for FY 10/11: K. Grunwald reviewed the goals and accomplishments that were submitted to the Town Manager's Office. C. Colon-Semenza suggested adding the presentation that we will be doing to our goals.
- b. Proposed Brochure: J. Tanner feels that the first bullet under accomplishments is too vague. She suggested something more specific, or to delete the bullet altogether. C. Colon-Semenza would like to leave it, but make it more specific. It was agreed that it will be changed to: "Instrumental in improving conditions related to accessibility for improved access to local businesses." Also: change "regularly reviewed; advocated, etc." to use a consistent tense.
- c. Election issues at Mansfield Community Center: K. Grunwald provided a response from the Town Clerk and the registrars, along with information about absentee ballots. We will discuss how to best promote information about absentee ballots at a future meeting.
- d. Publicity efforts/Community Presentation: C. Colon-Semenza contacted Cindy Dainton at the Senior Center. She suggested a presentation on the use of durable medical equipment/resources. This is scheduled for February at the Senior Center. The deadline for the Senior Sparks newsletter is January 1. Christina is looking for input on this; look at bringing in different groups to be present. She will be meeting with Jennifer Lortie to discuss her role. Christina asked for

suggestions about how to publicize this to the community. Committee members will work with her to publicize the event and contact different providers for resources.

- V. Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 3:45 PM. The next meeting is November 23. Cynthia Van Zelm of the Mansfield Downtown Partnership has been invited to present an update on the Storrs Downtown development and will identify issues that are being considered related to accessibility.